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Agenda

Peace and Security in Africa

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Peace and security in Africa

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Nigeria to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs; Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Ms. Fatima Yerima Askira, Borno Women Development Initiative and Youth Programmes Coordinator at Search for Common Ground Nigeria. Ms. Askira is joining us today by video teleconference from Maiduguri, north-east Nigeria.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Zerihoun.

Mr. Zerihoun: I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in the Lake Chad basin region, a region that continues to suffer from the combined effects of violent extremism and a serious humanitarian crisis as well as from human rights abuses and violations by terrorist elements and counter-terrorism measures. Boko Haram continues to perpetrate violence against civilians in the Lake Chad basin region, with varied frequency and intensity, through kidnappings, suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices and ambushes on towns and villages.

Since October 2016, Boko Haram has shifted most of its assaults to military positions. It is unclear whether the military is the intended target. However, the upsurge in clashes with the military seems to be the result of reaction to the counter-insurgency operations of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and a shift in tactics following the split in Boko Haram's leadership last August between Abubakar Shekau and his former second-in-command Abu Musab al-Barnawi. The recent trend of attacks appears to be in line with al-Barnawi's stated intention to focus operations less on Muslim civilians and more on military, Western and Christian targets.

Despite the commendable military efforts by the region against Boko Haram, including the takeover of its stronghold in the Sambisa Forest in Nigeria, Boko Haram retains the capacity to carry out attacks, as illustrated by its attack on 3 January on a military checkpoint in Baroua in the Diffa region of the Niger, the 7 January attack on a Nigerian military brigade in Buni Yadi town, Yobe state, in north-eastern Nigeria, and the multiple suicide attacks in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state, Nigeria, on 8 January.

Far too much time has passed since the fateful day of the kidnapping of the Chibok girls. The release of some of the girls, especially the 21 who were set free on 13 October following negotiations facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Swiss Government, is encouraging. According to the Nigerian Government, negotiations for the release of the remaining girls are continuing. Special Representative of the Secretary-General Chambas continues his engagement with the Nigerian authorities and international partners to determine how best to support the Government's efforts for the release of the remaining abductees. In his consultations, Special Representative Chambas continues to stress the need for the international community to support Nigeria in addressing the issue of mass abductions by Boko Haram, the rehabilitation and reintegration of abductees, and for better humanitarian access to the north-east of the country.

Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien will brief the Council on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad basin region and the challenges there. The countries of the Lake Chad basin continue to face a serious humanitarian crisis. The fact that the number of people in need of assistance has continued to increase underscores the seriousness of the situation and the need to address the root causes of the crisis, if further violence, displacement and loss of life are to be averted. The ongoing violence has had devastating effects in the region. It has destroyed lives, livestock and food stocks, paralysed the local economy and undermined the economic development of the affected countries. The economic impact of the crisis is substantial and is estimated at about $9 billion in north-eastern Nigeria alone.

Boko Haram's destructive activities have been taking place in areas of entrenched poverty and marginalization with high levels of income and social inequality, which has been caused, in part, by the absence of State authority and a severe financial crisis. The response of the United Nations, as well as that of the States concerned and their partners, will need to address the immediate violence and the humanitarian needs, while simultaneously addressing the root causes of the violent extremism and radicalization. Only a combined approach will help to repair the material and social damage inflicted on communities. The overall goal of the response to the Lake Chad basin crisis should be the achievement of lasting solutions, recovery and sustainable development. Support should also entail measures to help reverse the adverse effects of climate change on the livelihoods of communities in the affected areas, including the resuscitation of Lake Chad and the preservation of its microeconomy.

Despite the challenges, progress has been made in addressing the immediate humanitarian needs, as well as in the restoration of State authority and local governance systems in reclaimed areas. In northern Nigeria, the United Nations has significantly increased its physical presence so as to help improve social cohesion, basic social services, livelihoods, reconciliation and psychosocial support for returnees and internally displaced persons, as well as in the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure and in building the capacity of local Governments. The three-phased reconstruction and rehabilitation plan unveiled by the Nigerian Government on 7 January for the affected areas in the north-east over a five-year period is a welcome development and deserves support.

Grave human rights violations and abuses have accompanied the Boko Haram attacks and the counter-terrorism responses. Women and girls remain subject to sexual violence, including sexual slavery and forced marriage. Counter-insurgency operations, both by national forces and by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), have been accused of breaches of international humanitarian law, including the detention of Boko Haram suspects, including children, in dire conditions, and the prolonged holding of internally displaced persons and refugees by security forces for screening purposes. Notable measures have been taken by the Government of Nigeria to address the incidents of sexual and gender-based violence against displaced women and children in camps. We urge the authorities in all countries of the region to strengthen their responses to such violations and abuses, including by providing assistance to survivors, bringing all perpetrators to justice and providing targeted protection services in camps and host communities.

There have been encouraging reports of the surrender of former Boko Haram fighters in Chad and the Niger; those fighters are mostly nationals of those two countries. We encourage the authorities of the countries concerned to examine their rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for ex-Boko Haram fighters and their families, and to enable the United Nations and partners to better support the programmes.

The promotion and protection of the human rights of the victims of terrorism must be a priority in national responses to acts of terrorism. Respect for due process and prompt trials for persons detained for Boko Haram-related offences should guide broader counter-terrorism measures. Children detained in that connection should be treated as victims and dealt with in accordance with international standards for juvenile justice. All children encountered in military operations should be handed over to child protection actors, and standard operating procedures should be developed in that regard. The importance of ensuring that military and security responses respect international human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law and of taking all precautionary and preventive measures during operations to ensure the protection of the civilian population is self-evident. Failure to do so could fuel pre-existing grievances and perpetuate conflict. As the Secretary-General has emphasized, counter-terrorism measures and the protection of human rights should not be seen as conflicting goals, but rather as complementary and mutually reinforcing.

In order to support the efforts of Member States to combat terrorism and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice, the United Nations continues to provide strategic counter-terrorism technical assistance and training. Additionally, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, with the support of the European Union, held a high-level meeting in December 2016 with Nigerian federal and local authorities to consider approaches to prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating persons associated with Boko Haram. The consultations underlined the need to develop a comprehensive legal framework to deal with persons associated with Boko Haram,

including a prosecution strategy, and to design and implement human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive rehabilitation and reintegration strategies. Similar consultations will be proposed to Cameroon, Chad and the Niger during a visit by the Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee planned for early this year. The visit will aim at facilitating the development of national comprehensive and integrated approaches to prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating persons associated with Boko Haram, and at promoting regional cooperation in criminal law and other related matters.

The Multinational Joint Task Force is now undertaking military operations in the area of the thickly forested shores of Lake Chad and its many rivers. The operation faces unique challenges, including difficult terrain, a lack of dedicated airlift capacity, especially for casualty evacuation, logistics and the sustenance of troops, as well as the lack of amphibious capabilities, improvised explosive device detection equipment, night vision equipment, reconnaissance assets and long-range field communication equipment. The contribution of €50 million by the European Union Commission to the African Union Commission in support of the MNJTF and the funds provided by other bilateral donors need to be disbursed in a timely manner to the Lake Chad Basin Commission so as to enable the regional force to address the challenges it faces.

A military approach will not bring an end to Boko Haram. The countries affected must simultaneously tackle the humanitarian consequences, as well as the root causes that led to the emergence of the group. Military operations should be followed by stabilization measures, the restoration of State authority and efforts to address the social, economic and political grievances of marginalized communities. The four countries of the Lake Chad basin region are, without distinction, equally affected by the Boko Haram scourge, in a context of dire financial crisis and associated political and social tensions. They need the support of the Security Council and the wider international community if they are to succeed in their efforts to bring about stability and build the resilience of affected communities.

The United Nations remains committed and ready to support regional efforts to address the consequences and root causes of the Boko Haram crisis. However, the apparent failure of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to hold their long-planned joint ministerial summit on Boko Haram continues to be a concern. The United Nations continues to encourage the region to develop a common strategy to address the drivers of the Boko Haram crisis. The support of the Security Council in urging ECCAS and ECOWAS to convene their joint meeting will underscore the urgency of the matter.

The President: I thank Mr. Zerihoun for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad basin. I particularly want to thank Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun for so clearly and comprehensively setting up the context, the current dynamics and the options for actions. I especially appreciate that my remarks will be complemented by the genuine report from the ground by Ms. Fatima Yerema Askira of the Borno Women Development Initiative, who will be following me via video teleconference from Maiduguri.

The humanitarian crisis across north-east Nigeria and parts of Cameroon, Chad and the Niger, triggered by the horrendous, violent and inhuman campaign of Boko Haram, is deepening. Although Boko Haram has lost much of the territory that it once controlled — but by no means all of it — raids and suicide bombings targeting civilians continue to cause widespread death and destruction, fear and psychological and physical trauma. Those threats have wiped out livelihoods and vital infrastructure and prevent people from accessing essential services.

In July 2016, when I last briefed the Council on the Lake Chad basin (see S/PV.7748), approximately 9 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance. Since then, the crisis has grown further, and there are today 10.7 million people in need of assistance, including 8.5 million in north-east Nigeria and another 1.6 million in the Far North region of Cameroon. Some 2.4 million people are currently displaced, and the vast majority of them — more than 1.5 million — are children. While many families would undoubtedly prefer to return to their areas of origin, continued severe insecurity, limited livelihood opportunities and the lack of essential services still make that difficult, if not impossible, despite considerable encouragement, if not pressure, from local authorities. Members of the Council will recall that, in my most recent briefing, I spoke of how many internally displaced people, like Mustafa, whom I met at the Konduga camp near

Maiduguri, had been forced from their homes in Bama in the Lake Chad basin in mid-2015. And when you are torched out of your home, there is no home to return to.

As I witnessed during my latest mission to Nigeria and the Niger, about 80 per cent of the displaced persons are staying with host communities that are themselves among the world's poorest. But they have nevertheless generously opened their homes to the displaced. The protection needs that I highlighted during my briefing in July remain dire. Civilians face violations of humanitarian and human rights law every day, including death, injuries, sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary detention, disappearances, forced displacement and forced recruitment. In north-east Nigeria alone, more than 7,000 women and girls have been subjected to Boko Haram-initiated sexual violence, including forced marriage, rape, abduction and slavery. Upon their release, many of the survivors continue to be treated by their own communities as suspected Boko Haram sympathizers and face deep stigma preventing them from reintegrating effectively into society. In response, the United Nations and its partners have provided care and support to 5,900 women and children formerly associated with or captured by Boko Haram who have been victims of sexual and gender-based violence. However, those and other protection activities must be scaled up in order to ensure that the survivors receive the necessary medical care, psychosocial support and livelihood support. We also need to work even more closely with the Government and the communities to prevent the stigmatization of those women.

What started as a protection crisis has become a major food and nutrition crisis as well — today one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. More than one year ago, there were 3 million severely food-insecure people in need of assistance across the Lake Chad basin area. Despite the United Nations and partners' mobilizing response, today there are 7.1 million. As the Nigerian Government has scaled up its security offensive over the past six months, it has recovered land and released captured people and communities trapped at the tyrannous hands of Boko Haram, thereby revealing large numbers of oppressed, hungry and abused persons so quickly that it has outpaced the humanitarian response's ability to accelerate its action as well as our ability to raise additional funds from the international community to keep up. That therefore has resulted in the staggering increase in the numbers of very vulnerable people. The Multinational Joint Task Force has also driven many Boko Haram terrorists and agents back out of Cameroon, Chad and the Niger, thereby concentrating more challenges and needs in north-east Nigeria. For those reasons, food and nutritional insecurity have reached extreme levels, especially in parts of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states in Nigeria, with 5.1 million people food-insecure at crisis and emergency levels.

In the worst affected and least accessible areas, severe forms of hunger have been reported. Despite all the assistance going in today, it is clear that, given the forecasts that the situation may get even worse and that the numbers of those in need may continue to increase, our planning should be guided by those pessimistic assumptions. And that is all in addition to, and aside from, the chronic severe and moderate acute malnourishment across the wider Sahel region — to the west and north of the Lake Chad basin — affecting millions of people, mainly children, women, the elderly, the sick and those living with disabilities.

Children in north-east Nigeria and in the Lake Chad basin are particularly vulnerable in this situation, and reports indicate that the mortality rates for children under the age of 5 in individual internally displaced persons (IDP) locations have reached a level of four times the emergency threshold. In July 2016, I briefed the Council that 244,000 children in Nigeria's Borno state were severely acutely malnourished. Today, that number has grown to 300,000 children, and up to 450,000, as we must also include those from Borno, Adamawa and Yobe.

Despite such worrying trends, there is hope that 2017 will yet prove to be a turning point for the people affected by the crisis. As the nature of the conflict changes and an increasing number of areas are coming under Government control, now is the time to act decisively to expand humanitarian assistance and protection, as well as basic services, and thereby lay the groundwork for early recovery and reconstruction, so as to prevent this from becoming a protracted crisis. Over the past six months, together with each of the Governments in the Lake Chad basin region, we have taken significant steps forward in scaling up the humanitarian response. For example, the United Nations, with new leadership in Abuja and in Maiduguri, and its partners in Nigeria are reaching more than 2.1 million people with food assistance, more than 4 million with emergency primary health care and more than 1.7 million with

water and sanitation, despite a difficult and high-risk environment for aid workers.

Since the beginning of 2016, UNICEF has provided the following support to children in crisis-affected areas. Approximately 160,000 children under 5 years of age have been reached with lifesaving treatment for severe acute malnutrition. More than 4 million people have had access to primary health care services through Government-run health centres and clinics set up in both IDP camps and host communities. Approximately three quarters of a million people continue to have access to safe water, and more than 1 million people have access to sanitation facilities meeting international standards. More than 100,000 children have access to safe temporary learning spaces. Nearly 200,000 traumatized children have been provided with psychosocial support.

In support of the scale-up, since July 2015, within a month of my taking up this post, I have released over $91 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) for lifesaving humanitarian assistance to 3 million people affected by the crisis in the Lake Chad basin region. I would like to thank all Member States that supported that vital work through their contributions to the CERF, and I would urge every one here other than the three Security Council members who have already done so to make pledges for the CERF for 2017. Last December, during the CERF pledging conference for 2017, the President of the Niger himself, Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, described the CERF as a central and indispensable funding mechanism in support of humanitarian action to relieve the suffering of so many people across the Lake Chad basin.

I am pleased to report that we have a close cooperation with the Governments of the countries affected and that they are taking a fast-increasing lead in the humanitarian response. The Nigerian Government, for example, appointed a Chief Humanitarian Coordinator in October 2016 and in the last few weeks has set up platforms both at the capital and the State level for close coordination between the Government and the humanitarian community. And just in the last week, Nigeria's Presidential Committee on Northeast Initiatives has now adopted a three-phase reconstruction and rehabilitation plan, with an immediate focus on comprehensive relief efforts, social stabilization and early recovery to address the needs of 7 million people over the next 12 months. I welcome this and indeed other initiatives taken by the Governments of the four countries affected to provide immediate assistance to the people in need.

At the same time, several of the Governments in the Lake Chad basin are experiencing fiscal constraints as they face economic recession and are also involved in a costly military operation against Boko Haram. Their means to respond to the humanitarian crisis are thus limited and vastly surpassed by the scale of the needs. In September 2016, in the margins of the General Assembly, my Office organized a high-level event at which the Presidents of Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, and a senior Minister from Cameroon, all joined me in calling for humanitarian assistance for the Lake Chad basin, which was followed by new pledges of $163 million by donors at the same event; I thank them, a good result, but insufficient.

The regional humanitarian crisis that has significantly deepened and broadened with the despicable actions of Boko Haram takes place in an extremely fragile and rapidly changing part of the world, one that contains many of the elements — poverty, unemployment and the absence of prospects and opportunities for youth — conducive to both violent extremism and protracted humanitarian need. There is a clear need for continued action and attention from the international community and the Security Council.

In addition to the urgent provision of life-saving assistance to those in need, we must also address the root causes of the crisis, particularly at the community level. Poverty, underdevelopment and environmental degradation need to be addressed through longer-term assistance, supporting the sustained efforts of the Governments of the countries affected. As humanitarians, we are ready to continue to scale up and to work closely with development partners, in line with the outcomes of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. I would like to call on Member States to ensure that development and political actors strengthen longer-term investments to address the root causes of the conflict.

This is the time to stand in solidarity with the people of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and the Niger. This crisis is urgent. Without our action, our political engagement and sustained humanitarian and development assistance, we will not be able to prevent this from becoming an even more protracted crisis. For example, supporting agriculture will be key to allowing people to re-establish their livelihoods and to avoid creating dependency on aid. In north-east Nigeria,

many farmers have missed three planting seasons in a row. It is vital to support them immediately, as doing so now would allow them to prepare their land and plant their crops ahead of the next rainy season, in June.

As the Council is aware, initially, 19 months ago, it was extremely difficult, despite repeated events and statements, to get the global community's attention focused on the humanitarian issues of the people in the Lake Chad basin; it was as though I was shouting into an empty room.

Today, the situation is different, as there is growing global attention and focus on the Lake Chad basin, and a clear recognition, including by the Governments of the countries affected, that this is a major humanitarian crisis and not just a security situation. In Nigeria, the epicentre of the crisis, the United Nations has a new and strong leadership in place and a close coordination with the Government, as I briefed the Council earlier, and mechanisms to iron out tensions as and when they arise. I am very heartened to learn of the Council's proposed visit to the area in the coming period, subject to arrangements being finalized.

Donors have demonstrated increasing commitment to the crisis in the Lake Chad basin, contributing more than $238 million to the humanitarian response in the Lake Chad basin in the second half of 2016, thus tripling their contributions compared with the first six months of the year. This led the appeal for the Lake Chad basin in 2016 to be 49 per cent funded. But it is that, 49 per cent, so we can do only less than half of what we know is needed. Despite this acceleration of contributions, which I commend, we need donors to dig even deeper. We also need more donors to come on board. And, as the Council will appreciate from all that I have just set out, the 2017 humanitarian response plan and appeal for the Lake Chad basin has doubled relative to the one in 2016, reflecting the deteriorating situation in the region, to $1.5 billion. Together, we simply must do more, and from here it is funding that is key.

In addition, I call on the Council to maintain and enhance its support for national and regional action, that is, security, political as well as humanitarian; support for the conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad basin being organized in Norway on 24 February; support for development strategies to help sustain recovery and peace; and support for the engagement of local organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international NGOs.

Over the past 12 months, the crisis has not only persisted, but grown in dramatic fashion. Serious protection concerns remain, and the food security situation is critical. In the face of this reality, we have made progress in scaling up the response, but it is still not enough. We now need to redouble our collective efforts to meet the growing needs. During my many travels to the Lake Chad basin over the decades, I have been struck by the tremendous resilience and generosity of the people. Their ability to cope with severe hardship and shocks is second to none. My hope is that today's discussion will take us further towards a collective response that is commensurate with the desperate plight, and the almost unique resilience, of the people in the Lake Chad basin.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I give the floor to Ms. Askira.

Ms. Askira: I thank you, Sir, for allowing me to speak at this meeting today.

May I kindly invite the Council to join me, here in the outskirts of Maiduguri, the place where I live.

Please take a moment to picture a community of vulnerable women and children outside the city, with neither a floor nor a bed. There is a woman in her early 70s lying sick in the sun, covering her body with a carpet cloth; that is what she calls a blanket. Her grandchildren, aged 4, 6 and 7, are sitting right next to her, often with no idea of what to eat.

I was in this community, on the outskirts of Maidugiri, three days ago. I went to give assistance and give blankets to the children. This is to tell the Council that such communities actually exist. They do not exist because people choose to live there, but because people do not have a better place to go.

Another is a young girl, Yaga, who looks a lot like I did when I was 15 years old. We all know how 15-year-olds are. She was abducted by an armed group and, fortunately, got released. Yaga is struggling to be integrated into her community, her family, her friends, people with whom she has been staying with her whole life. I noticed the fear in her face when I was speaking to her and she mentioned to me that she had suffered from stigmatization. We all knew she was scared of being alone. She was scared of people pointing to her a terrorist. She was scared that people would look at her as associated with Boko Haram. That girl could easily have been me, but I had met her — who could not be

me — and she was in this situation because we did not do enough to prevent violent conflict from affecting her. We could not protect her and we could not protect her community.

She said: "I really want to be like you, Fatima, because you inspire me." That was so touching. People here are not hopeless, but the frustration and desperation make them want to make changes. I know of many young people whose stories are inspiring. I know a lady who actually volunteered her time to go and teach the people in an internally displaced persons (IDPs) camp. I know a group of young boys who came up with a challenge to do something. They encouraged many young people to engage in different ways to pass on this message, enrol in school and even teach in their community schools and in IDP camps, as well.

I started a campaign on 8 December to raise money and get clothing and blankets for women and children IDPs. Those who gave the most were people who did not have much at all, but still gave because they did not want anyone to sleep in the cold. By 3 January, we were able to reach a little more than $1,500, with which we managed to buy about 500 blankets and share them with 500 people. It turns out that we are still receiving a lot from people, because people are still supporting one another. People are still believing that they should actually help one another.

I launched the campaign through social media. It got the attention of many and made an impact in the community. I thought it was important to recognize the collegial efforts of people on the ground who want to remain your friends and who are changing life and protecting the community to the best of their ability. And to the members of the Security Council and the Governments they represent, I want to say that ordinary Nigerians like me are working every day to improve security and reintegration into the community, and to start rebuilding our lives and our region. We are grateful for the Council's political, military and financial support. While the Council debates, our region is in shambles. I want to add two points.

First, we are grateful for all the humanitarian and development assistance. As the United Nations and its members' Governments design future programmes, I would like to ask that they ensure that the programmes they support have mechanisms to communicate with and listen to communities, and that there is transparency and flexibility. In some areas, we have seen that helping people recover is a challenge, and support is needed for that. In other regions, it is still too unsafe for people to relocate and we need aid that is adequate to addressing such emergency situations — aid that prevents trauma and local conflicts, promotes people's coexistence, affects communities and reduces tension.

Secondly, as the Council looks at security in our region today, I would like to ask it to go beyond just looking at the war against Boko Haram, extending it to proactive prevention of violent conflict as a long-term solution to the emergent threat to the ethnic and religious balance here in Nigeria and in the Lake Chad region in general. We need a peace architecture, a way for citizens — young and old, male and female, boys and girls — and the State working together to reduce the scourge of Boko Haram, but also to address the conflict between farmers and herders and ethnic and religious conflict. Right now peacebuilding is urgently needed, especially when it can be used to engaged young people and women in dealing with the horrors we have seen from Boko Haram and the Islamic State — not that they should stop at that. Of course, it is impossible to exaggerate the humanitarian need, as I highlighted before. From my story, we can see clearly that the need for scaling up is plainly there. I believe that donor agencies and the members of the Security Council will try their best to actually see this scaled up to the maximum.

I am grateful for the rare opportunity to share this experience and some of my recommendations with the Council. As a young woman, I am truly honoured that the Council is listening to young people on the front lines.

The President: On behalf of all the members of the Security Council, I should like to thank our briefers for their useful and informative reports, bringing to us the complexity and scale of the challenge that is facing the region — but also, like Fatima just did, a flavour of what individuals are going through on the ground as we speak, and of local campaigns and inititiatives. I understand that, due to the late hour and the security situation in north-eastern Nigeria, we fully understand if Ms. Askira needs to leave the meeting, but I want to thank her for joining us and for her excellent contribution to this important meeting. I would like to convey to her our support for her and her colleagues for her invaluable input and for her efforts on a daily basis.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank you so much, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. I also thank the briefers — Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun; Under-Secretary-General O'Brien, who has led for so long on this issue and challenge; and, above all, Ms. Askira, for sharing the vital voice from the ground. I think what she described speaks to what the briefers have noted, which is the generosity of people, who have so little themselves, and how generous they have been in opening up their homes to these internally displaced persons. The fact that the vast majority of the displaced in Maiduguri live with other families who themselves are struggling to deal with this threat and to deal with very difficult socioeconomic conditions, really demonstrates tremendous goodness. Ms. Askira is an embodiment of that and I thank her.

In 2016, a famine likely happened on our watch — not in one of the places that dominates the Security Council's agenda, but in the Borno state of north-eastern Nigeria, in the area of Bama — a likely famine. Severe fighting kept humanitarian agencies from reaching Bama for nearly 18 months. When they were finally able to access the town and assess the situation, they found that at least 2,000 people in Bama had died from the effects of famine last year, mostly young children.

The situation in Bama has since improved somewhat with the arrival of aid. But right now, across north-eastern Nigeria there are far more towns that are not getting food assistance, where people are experiencing the most extreme levels of hunger. As many as 800,000 people are living just like the people of Bama last year, cut off from food aid; 800,000 people who are at acute risk — as we sit here — of literally starving to death.

Famines, as we all know, are not natural occurrences. Famines are man-made. The fact that anyone could be experiencing famine conditions in the year 2017 should spur the Council to do everything it possibly can to ensure that food assistance reaches those who are starving. The world does not lack for food to send, but aid workers need more funding and they need greater security. And the Nigerian Government, at every level — federal, state, and local — must collaborate with United Nations humanitarian agencies and international non-governmental organizations to get aid out the door. If famines are man-made, that means that the solutions are man-made as well.

To be clear, it is impossible to overstate the savagery of Boko Haram — the savagery of the group that has set in motion the events that have given rise to these conditions and the misery that they have caused around the Lake Chad basin. This is a terrorist group that forces mothers with infant children and girls as young as 9 years old to walk into markets and detonate suicide vests. Boko Haram fighters systematically enslave and rape women and girls in camps deep in the forest, force marriages and brainwash defenceless victims to get them to carry out more attacks. They forcibly conscript boys to fight in Boko Haram's ranks, and they hold those boys in captivity in virtual enslavement against their will.

The Chibok girls kidnapped more than 1,000 days ago from their school remain the most well-known example of Boko Haram's brutality, with 195 of the original 276 girls still in captivity to this day. They are among the thousands and thousands of people held by Boko Haram, as millions across the region live in fear that Boko Haram will capture them or their loved ones next. The deepening linkages between Boko Haram and the Islamic State are alarming and ominously suggest that such a clear and present threat to international peace and security may get worse.

As the Council has heard, the statistics are grim. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, there are 1.64 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in north-eastern Nigeria alone. Because that area remains so insecure, owing to Boko Haram, 76 per cent of the IDPs fear going back to their homes, where they could plant crops and take care of themselves and their families. Across the entire Lake Chad basin region, 5.1 million people are food-insecure, which includes 455,000 with what the United Nations system and others call severe acute malnutrition. In plain English, severe acute malnutrition means that if those 450,000 kids do not get food rations and emergency nutrition interventions quickly, one out of five of those 450,000 will likely die.

Statistics alone cannot convey the human cost of the crisis or the extent of the brutality that drives it. Last spring, I visited refugees camps in the region — in Cameroon and Nigeria — to meet with victims of Boko Haram. I have seen many refugee camps over the course of my career, but meeting those who fled from Boko

Haram was like nothing I had ever experienced before. Virtually every individual whom I met described for me either a close relative who had been slaughtered by Boko Haram or an experience where they had had a child who was literally grabbed from their arms — an infant child, daughter or son. The marauders just came in and stole their child. Many of us here are parents and can well imagine how a parent must feel remembering the clutching and the cries of their child as they were taken by such savages.

In the wake of crimes like that, those broken, shattered families are too frequently stuck in squalid IDP camps, with virtually no services, no health care and no education. Those are the people now dying because assistance is not getting through fast enough. I would urge the Council to witness that situation up close, travel to the region to see the crisis and meet the families, speak to men who have seen their wives and daughters dragged off into the bush, women who have watched their sons gunned down before them. We must be emboldened by their pain. There should be more people here in the Security Council Chamber for today's discussion. This kind of thing is not run of the mill. It is an extreme crisis, and we have to draw more coverage to it. I think that a trip could help to achieve that. But we also have to bring a greater sense of urgency to our deliberations.

It is definitely the case that there are many in the Nigerian Government — and I know that we will hear from our Nigerian colleagues — who are working tirelessly to save lives. On the other hand, we continue to see reports, including this week, of some who dispute the magnitude of the crisis and state that humanitarian agencies are exaggerating the statistics. Some have even maligned the role of the United Nations in delivering lifesaving assistance. It is extremely important that United Nations officials be able to get in there and visit people in need so that they can ascertain in an impartial way what the needs are.

Part of what is causing some of the access issues is a concern about the rampant insecurity, a concern about Boko Haram, and that is a very legitimate concern and something that preoccupies the humanitarian aid workers in the region as well. But it is essential for the aid groups, the United Nations and the Government to expeditiously develop a plan for improving access. Nearly every time the humanitarian agencies acquire access to a new location that had previously been off-limits, the needs encountered prove far worse that had been imagined before. For example, when United Nations agencies and other non-governmental organizations arrived in the town of Rann in Borno state on 22 December, just a couple of weeks ago, aid workers discovered around 400 fresh graves of people who had just died of hunger and untreated illness.

What more can the Council do? In order to defeat Boko Haram, the international community has to generally devote far more resources to supporting a more effective, regionally led military response. Here too, there are positive signs. Together, Nigeria, the Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin are slowly but steadily improving regional military coordination. Boko Haram controls a small fraction of the territory it had back in 2015. The military operations of those countries deserve our collective support, and the United States is dispatching advisers, sharing intelligence and providing training, equipment and logistic support to our partners. But there is no separating the imperative of defeating Boko Haram from the need to address the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in the region. That means that Governments must facilitate access for humanitarian organizations, and I cannot stress access enough.

The Nigerian Government must work with the United Nations and regional Governments to develop options for delivering aid to more areas, even near the front lines. Although we know that the military operations must continue, humanitarian organizations are ready. They work in war zones all the time, but they need permission to move in. In some cases, security is still fragile, so the aid groups can reach communities only with the help of armed convoys that must be coordinated with the Nigerian military. Unfortunately, coordinating aid with the availability of armed convoys is now turning into a serious bottleneck, a serious impediment. The Government and the United Nations will need to work together on expediting aid delivery. It is a logistic and operational question that needs to be resolved soon.

Donors have to do far more. As we have heard, the Lake Chad basin region has become the site of one of the world's greatest overlooked crises, and I think that we see it in the modest level of interest in today's meeting. The United Nations 2016 humanitarian appeal ended up just half-funded. The States Members of the United Nations need to move quickly to donate the $1 billion that the United Nations has requested for this year.

Let me conclude with a final suggestion, and that is, once again, to reinforce my claim that far more Security Council involvement is needed. What we are discussing today is a transnational, counter-terrorism challenge involving one of the world's most dangerous terrorist groups, and the region's desperate humanitarian needs are the result of that group's monstrous actions. The situation in the Lake Chad basin region presents therefore the textbook definition of a threat to international peace and security. It is what the Council is on this Earth to address.

Let us do it then; let us see the crisis for ourselves. Let us demand that the United Nations and its partners have access to the millions of people who so badly need food, water and medicine, and let us look for other ways to have the United Nations play a positive role, such as helping to reintegrate the victims of Boko Haram's violence — too many of whom, as we have heard, carry a stigma when they are freed or manage to escape. Or, after discussing on Tuesday the importance of sustaining peace (see S/PV.7857), let us work on rebuilding institutions in that region.

The need could not be more urgent. In an interview last week, a Médecins sans frontières doctor talked about what it was like to visit camps in Borno, Nigeria. She said,

> "when I go to the field, I am used to being surrounded by a lot of kids, but in Borno, the kids, especially children under five, were missing. Most of them have, unfortunately, already died".

A 31-year-old mother in Cameroon named Dayo told an aid worker that she was sometimes so hungry that she was losing her senses. Dayo said,

> "When somebody spoke to me, I couldn't even tell if it was a man or a woman".

Or finally, Awa Mudu, stranded in another IDP camp, was interviewed coming back from a nearby forest, carrying some leaves to eat. As Awa said, "The leaves are not enough to live on, but that is all we have." The Council can help give the people of the Lake Chad basin, people like Awa, more to live on. But we must do far more.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I would like to thank today's briefers, and to pay special tribute to Ms. Fatima Askira for the bravery she represents and the inspiration she gives to many.

The United Kingdom is taking the floor in this afternoon's open meeting because we believe we cannot afford to stay silent on this issue, as Ms. Power has so clearly articulated. We have just heard that the humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad basin is simply horrifying. More than 11 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. More than 2 million are displaced in north-eastern Nigeria alone, with hundreds of thousands more in the Niger, Cameroon and Chad. And it will only get worse. In a matter of months, supplies from the poor harvest will begin to run out, further compounding a disastrous situation.

Behind the suffering of the millions of men, women and children in the Lake Chad basin lie the brutality and unrelenting cruelty of Boko Haram. The group is a clear threat to international peace and security, and we have a clear responsibility to take action in response. That action will require a sustained, multi-year international effort to address the overwhelming humanitarian need and the drivers of conflict that have helped Boko Haram flourish in the first place. We must therefore up our game. I call on donors, Governments in the region and international non-governmental organizations to act with urgency to step up their efforts. Collectively, our response so far has frankly been inadequate and underfunded. The United Nations has called for $1 billion for Nigeria and $310 for Cameroon. The United Kingdom will do its bit. In September, we announced an additional $97 million in humanitarian aid for the region on top of our existing multi-year commitment of $110 million. I hope that others will join us.

But money alone is not enough. We must also see strong, effective leadership, both from Governments in the region and from the United Nations. We look to the Organization to increase its capacity in the Lake Chad basin and develop multi-year plans, coordinated across borders, to aid recovery. We in this Chamber must also show leadership ourselves. A Security Council visit to the region in the coming weeks would be a signal of that leadership and a chance for all of us to see at first hand the challenges the region is facing. One such is the worrying report of forcibly incentivized returns of displaced people to areas that remain unsafe. When one has fled murder or enslavement, it is simply unthinkable to be forced back to the scene of that horror, and unthinkable to be lied to or coerced into returning. All the parties to the conflict have a responsibility to respect international conventions on returns and on

the protection of civilians more broadly. I urge them to do so.

Ultimately, a humanitarian response is just one part of the solution. It is a vital part, of course, but it must be delivered hand in hand with a coherent security, political and economic response as well. There is little sense in healing the wounds of conflict without addressing its root causes. Let us therefore call on all Governments in the region to win the peace — to tackle underdevelopment and other conflict drivers, and to do so in a way that respects international humanitarian and human-rights laws. That means doing so for all people in the region and making sure that women have an equal say and an equal role in reaching that peace. It is vital that strategies for tackling Boko Haram include women's voices. That includes all efforts to free the remaining Chibok girls, and also when providing protection for women affected by sexual and gender-based violence.

I would like to conclude by turning to Maiduguri in north-eastern Nigeria. We raised the subject of the plight of displaced people in that city six months ago, when we last discussed this issue (see S/PV.7748). Six months on, the situation remains desperate. More than 1 million displaced people now call Maiduguri home. The cost of food has doubled in the past year. Disease and hunger are all too common. But there are signs of hope. In the past three months, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has delivered 810 tons of food to Maiduguri. As the head of the MSF mission there made clear, it is not normally the role of a medical charity to provide people with food. But faced with a desperate need, MSF stepped up to help. That is the spirit that we should all channel in the weeks and months ahead if we are to end the catastrophe in the Lake Chad basin.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Mr. Tayé Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for their briefings on the situation in the Lake Chad region. I would particularly like to thank Ms. Fatima Yerima Askira of the Borno Women Development Initiative for her especially powerful testimony, which is a source of inspiration for all of us.

As we have seen in recent weeks, Boko Haram, while weakened, still has a real ability to conduct targeted, lethal attacks, particularly in Borno state, and, as we have just heard, the crisis it has provoked has resulted in enormous humanitarian problems. Women in particular have been targeted. This vulnerable population is not safe anywhere, and we are well aware of how difficult the situation in the camps for displaced persons is. Too often, the Lake Chad basin is not on the the major international media's radar screen, despite the fact that it is one of the regions of the world most in need of us and our engagement. In that regard, we are actively encouraging the efforts of the countries of the region and the United Nations and working with them on three main fronts.

The first is military, with the goal of combating Boko Haram with all the determination that requires and weakening its ability to do harm. We know that the military effort led by the countries of the region, coordinated through a multinational hybrid force, is a particularly difficult one both militarily and financially. We are all united in the fight against terrorism, whatever form it takes and wherever it strikes. That is why France has expressed its solidarity through its active support for the operations against Boko Haram led by the countries of the region. In particular, we have been supplying useful intelligence to the countries involved as well as logistical support to Chad and the Niger and training for the Cameroonian forces. The current military operations have already shown their effectiveness. Many soldiers have already shed their blood in the regional offensive and we pay them respectful tribute.

The second priority is the humanitarian one, for, as we have said, the problems are huge. It is vital to ensure that the United Nations focuses all its efforts, in close collaboration with all its partners and the local authorities, on responding to the people's needs. In that regard, we hope that the humanitarian hubs established by the United Nations in north-eastern Nigeria as base camps for the humanitarian workers will enable them to access the population more quickly and will be operational as soon as possible. We are especially grateful to Médecins Sans Frontières and all the humanitarian organizations that are working on the ground. I should recall here that international law applies to everyone and that all the parties are obliged to allow the United Nations and its partners access to the displaced. The countries involved in the crisis are on the front lines when it comes to facilitating humanitarian access, coordinating the various initiatives and ensuring that aid for the displaced is not diverted. France will do its full share in this collective effort. For 2017 alone

we have already contributed €13.5 million in response to the humanitarian needs of the countries affected by Boko Haram.

The third priority is development in the regions where Boko Haram has established itself. Without that essential ingredient, this terrorist movement will continue to prosper thanks to the poverty and sense of exclusion that fuel it. That is why France has launched the Lake Chad Initiative with funding amounting to €35 million. This major initiative seeks to promote the economic recovery of the region and the creation of employment, especially for young people, who are, it should be remembered, the first target of Boko Haram.

In the context just referred to, the Lake Chad basin region must be at the heart of the Council's priorities. As the Secretary-General has urged, let us combine all the military, humanitarian and development means at our disposal in order to make a difference on the ground. In that spirit, France strongly supports the plan for an upcoming visit by the Security Council to the region.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun, Under-Secretary-General O'Brien and Ms. Askira for their briefings.

Recently, the overall situation in Central and West Africa has been stable. The regional countries have strengthened their security cooperation, and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) of the Lake Chad basin countries has made good progress in combating terrorism. China appreciates those developments. On the other hand, the security problems and the humanitarian situation in the Central and West African region remain very serious. Repeated terrorist attacks and displaced civilians, together with rampant violent crimes, pose a threat to the security and stability of the region. The international community should strengthen its support for the countries of Central and West Africa, including the countries of the Lake Chad basin region.

First, they should support countries of the region in their counter-terrorism efforts. African counter-terrorism efforts constitute a very important component in international counter-terrorism efforts. Subject to the condition of respecting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the countries concerned, the international community should assist the countries of the region in building their capacity to fight terrorism, enable the MNJTF to effectively conduct its operations, and further eliminate the threats posed by terrorism to the countries of the region.

Secondly, there must be greater cooperation with regional and subregional organizations, including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. The international community must respect the leading role played by regional organizations in addressing the region's problems and fully leverage the unique expertise and advantages that those organizations have with a view to building synergies and promoting appropriate solutions to regional hotspot issues through such methods as dialogue, mediation and good offices.

Thirdly, the countries of the region must also be provided with assistance to accelerate their development and address the root causes of conflict. The international community should provide financial and technical assistance to those countries on the basis of respect for their national sovereignty, so that they can truly build their capacities and enhance their economic and social development.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has just completed a visit to five African countries, namely, Madagascar, Zambia, Tanzania, the Republic of the Congo and Nigeria. That visit achieved its planned goals of deepening friendship, enhancing communication, aligning ideas, building greater confidence and deepening our cooperation. China will continue to uphold the policy of sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith and the correct viewpoint on righteousness and benefit. China will faithfully implement the results of the Johannesburg Summit meeting of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. China is ready to work with the international community and the countries concerned to support the countries of Central and West Africa in their efforts to achieve lasting peace and common prosperity and make new contributions to peace and development in Africa.

Mr. Moustafa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by thanking the three briefers on the security and humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad basin region. I thank Ms. Askira in particular for giving us a local view on the situation. Those briefings have given us some idea of the humanitarian tragedy that the region is facing. It is a tragedy that the countries and people of the region have been suffering for some time now. Unfortunately, the crisis has gotten more serious

recently, as was indicated by the briefers, owing in particular to the security situation in certain countries, such as Mali and Libya, and the environmental threats in the region.

The military operations of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) have made significant progress in fighting Boko Haram and have been able to limit its activity. We commend the leadership of the MNJTF. Egypt calls upon the international partners and the international community to increase their aid to the MNJTF so that it can, once and for all, complete its task, put an end to Boko Haram and liberate the outstanding areas still under that group's control.

With regard to prevention, Egypt would invite the international community to provide the necessary support to the Governments of the region to help them with their rehabilitation programmes for former Boko Haram fighters and to help the Governments to rehabilitate the villages that have been freed from Boko Haram.

At the 10 January ministerial open debate under your presidency (see S/PV.7857), my delegation stressed the need to adopt an approach that would address the root causes of those problems. The crisis in the Lake Chad basin region is an example of a situation that would benefit from such an approach. We need to concentrate on developing institutional and human capacity in order to eradicate the terrorist groups and counter their ability to recruit young people to commit crimes on their behalf. That requires assistance to the countries of the region so that they are able to invest in health and economic and social development projects. We need to build and sustain peace in order to put an end to the crisis, as Ambassador Power said a few moments ago. That means, inter alia, that we need to have a new comprehensive Sahel strategy, because the strategy up until now has been rather lacking.

The approach that I have referred to requires the international community, including the United Nations and its specialized agencies and regional and subregional organizations, to pool their efforts and work together with the States of the region. What is needed is coordination and cooperation among the mechanisms of all of the parties concerned, because that will ensure peace and save the peoples of the region from political, humanitarian and security crises.

Egypt is fully prepared to step up its cooperation with the countries of the Lake Chad basin region through projects and programmes under the Egyptian Partnership Agency for Development, with a view to alleviating the crisis faced by the region and its people. That will be within the framework of a comprehensive strategy aimed at sustaining peace in that region and other regions of the African continent.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Zerihoun and Ms. Askira for their important briefings.

Years of violence by Boko Haram have profoundly undermined peace, security and livelihoods in the Lake Chad basin region. The ongoing hit-and-run attacks by Boko Haram have displaced millions of people, disrupting agricultural activities and access to basic services. As indicated by our briefers today, the humanitarian crisis in the region has unfortunately become even worse since the previous briefing in July 2016 (see S/PV.7748).

Japan has focused its financial assistance to the Lake Chad basin region on humanitarian assistance and the strengthening of social stability. On the bilateral front, we announced approximately $3 million in food assistance to the Niger in December 2016. In the light of the large gender impact of the Boko Haram crisis, we have also been supporting the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women's Gender-Responsive Humanitarian Action and Assistance of Women and Girls Affected by Boko Haram Terrorism in Diffa, the Niger, since last year. We hope to do more. But obviously, the scope and intricacy of the challenges facing the region require more than humanitarian assistance. The continuous efforts of the Multinational Joint Task Force and other military operations by countries in the region have significantly contained Boko Haram and dislodged them from their former strongholds. As tragically illustrated by the attacks on soldiers in Diffa on 31 December, the region must, however, remain vigilant against insurgents, who are still capable of attacking villages and military installations.

Along with the progress in military operations, the long-term socioeconomic development challenges also require persistent attention. As noted by the President of Nigeria during the Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa, which was held in December last year, reducing youth unemployment promotes stabilization and discourages recruitment by Boko Haram. We must not allow Boko Haram to continue to poison young people, who are among the

most precious assets of Africa. The Council needs to mobilize comprehensive responses to the complex issues affecting the Lake Chad basin region and work towards sustaining peace. It is equally vital that the countries in the region demonstrate ownership of the socioeconomic development activities in their communities over the long term.

Japan supports the proposed Security Council mission to the region aimed at assessing the situation in the Lake Chad basin region and hopes that it will result in useful discussions with the regional stakeholders and demonstrate the keen awareness of the Council of the crisis.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Mr. Zerihoun, Mr. O'Brien, and Ms. Fatima Yerima Askira for their briefings.

The situation in the Lake Chad basin region is very alarming. Lake Chad, or the "vanishing lake", as it is also known, has already lost 90 per cent of its surface area over the past 40 years. Of the population around the basin, there are approximately 10 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. That number is equal to three times the total population of my country. Unfortunately, however, that crisis has received very little media coverage, and the international community does not know very much about it.

Uruguay has been following the crisis in that area from a comprehensive point of view. There are a number of aggravating factors contributing to the crisis, in particular the very difficult security situation undermined by the terrorist group, Boko Haram, the lack of food supplies, and the unmet needs of the population, among others. The multidimensional nature of the humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad basin region has a whole range of causes and consequences that everyone here is aware of and which we do not need to spell out in detail here.

Last Tuesday, we held an open debate (see S/PV.7857) at the ministerial level on conflict prevention and sustaining peace, during which much was said about the importance of preventing conflict and the need to carry out activities that contribute to sustaining peace. The Lake Chad basin region has been facing a multifaceted structural crisis for many years now, and it is necessary to undertake activities that not only mitigate the terrorist threat and provide food supplies to the population, but that also contribute to long-term stability. The Security Council and the United Nations as a whole should make full use of their interventions so as to address and contain the crisis there.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, there are 1.9 million internally displaced people in Nigeria alone, of which half are children. The region is very insecure, with very high population growth rates, and is affected by climate change, poverty and low levels of investment and social infrastructure. The region cannot have a promising future unless its countries, and its communities in particular, are given the necessary tools to emerge from this severe crisis and build lasting peace. The international community should spare no effort to provide the region with those instruments. That is why Uruguay considers it important to acknowledge the role of the United Nations specialized agencies, as well as that of the donor countries that have lived up to their pledges of assistance. We would also like to recognize the role of the Multinational Joint Task Force and its progress in combating Boko Haram. That is a clear example of the fact that coordinated regional efforts are essential in crises of this type, where those who are trying to undermine stability recognize neither borders nor nations.

In a region where 10 million people need assistance, where 7 million people are severely undernourished and 2.7 million people are internally displaced, we need to address the deep-rooted causes of the crisis, including hunger, lack of education and access to water, insecurity, lack of medical facilities, among other factors. We need, therefore, to offer lasting solutions to the people in the region that can bolster their capacity for resilience and adaptability in the face of so much adversity.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I thank the President for organizing this briefing. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun,and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for their updates. I also thank Ms. Askira for her testimony.

Italy has been following very closely the situation in north-eastern Nigeria, the Lake Chad basin and the region as a whole, where, as we have heard, there is an ongoing complex crisis encompassing security, development and humanitarian factors. In a demonstration of its concern, Italy recently decided to open a new Embassy in Niamey, the Niger, which will provide an addition to our already extensive network in that part of the world.

First, with regard to the security dimension, although some progress has been achieved against Boko Haram, it continues to represent a serious threat to peace and security. We therefore fully support the ongoing efforts by the Governments of the region, regional organizations and the Multinational Joint Task Force to curb the activities of Boko Haram. We support their efforts, both bilaterally and through the European Union — which, by the way, is providing substantial funding for the mission. Moreover, we are concerned by the numerous trafficking networks that are operating in the region. We cannot underestimate their ties with Boko Haram and transnational criminal activities. We believe that we must show resolve in combating all instances of smuggling, especially human trafficking, which is connected to that phenomenon.

In that regard, I would like to mention resolution 2195 (2014), which calls for international action to secure borders and prosecute illicit networks so as to prevent terrorists from benefiting from transnational organized crime, and urges Member States to enhance regional coordination on cross-border counter-measures to fight terrorist- and other related crimes. We believe that the role played by regional and subregional organizations is essential in countering those threats, and the Council must encourage them to play an even more proactive role by also developing a comprehensive regional strategy. In that respect, this very debate could perhaps give new momentum to the proposal for a joint summit between the Economic Community of Central African States and the Economic Community of West African States to discuss the threat posed by Boko Haram from a regional perspective. That is why we also fully support the idea of a Security Council mission to the region, as it would provide an opportunity to deliver a strong unified message of support and commitment, as well as an opportunity to examine the effects of climate change on security and the displacement of people in the region.

Turning briefly to the humanitarian aspect, we have heard about the terrible situation that millions of people in the region are facing. Boko Haram, which compounds that difficulty, continues to use sexual and gender-based violence and rape as weapons of war, as well as to exploit women and minors as suicide bombers. We therefore believe that efforts to prevent and address sexual violence should also be strategically aligned with efforts to prevent violent extremism and terrorism in the region. We are particularly concerned by the increasing number of internally displaced persons. Although we have heard the sheer numbers of people involved, we also wish to draw attention to the fact that the current instability, the effects of climate change in the region and the movement of populations create an environment that is conducive to illicit activities, such as smuggling and human trafficking. In that respect, we believe that it is important to increase the involvement of economic and development actors, such as the World Bank, and to direct our efforts towards institution-building, which other colleagues have mentioned, and towards strengthening infrastructure in the region. Accordingly, it is key to extend to the countries of the region initiatives developed by the Peacebuilding Commission based on the concept of sustaining peace and preventive diplomacy, so as to ensure the implementation of early development programmes as a potential means to reduce the risks of radicalization.

In conclusion, Italy stands ready to support the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other international agencies to bring relief to the people affected by the massive humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad basin region, as well as the Government of Nigeria, which must be supported in its tireless efforts. We must also strengthen cooperation with the agencies and non-governmental agencies on the ground. Italy also contributes bilaterally and through United Nations agencies, in particular by funding projects aimed at strengthening the resiliency of the local population and mitigating the risks of internal displacement and migration.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I wish to thank Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for their briefings on the security and humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad basin region. I also wish to thank Ms. Askira for her briefing via video teleconference.

The security challenge faced by the region, including but not limited to the threats of terrorism and violent extremism, should indeed be a matter of huge concern. Both Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien were very convincing in their description of the magnitude of the challenge that the region is facing. At the same time, we take note of the progress that the countries of the region have made in the fight against Boko Haram through the Multinational Joint Task Force of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. However, we know that that terrorist

group continues to pose serious a threat to peace and stability in the region by targeting innocent civilians, particularly women and children.

The attempts by Boko Haram to forge links with known regional and international terrorist networks, including Al-Qaida, Da'esh and Al-Shabaab, present a matter that needs to be taken seriously. Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun has highlighted the various dimensions of the threat posed by Boko Haram, and we share those concerns. We believe that it is critical to support the countries of the region and their various existing security mechanisms by sharing intelligence and by building their capacity to handle old and new security challenges.

In that regard, we take note of the work being done by the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) in cooperation with other United Nations bodies, and we encourage the CTITF to help the region develop a comprehensive and integrated strategy to counter terrorism and violent extremism. Furthermore, the need for the coordination of efforts among the United Nations, the African Union and their respective regional mechanisms cannot be overemphasized. In that context, we believe that the proposal for the Security Council to undertake a visit to the region together with the African Union Peace and Security Council would send the right message. We fully subscribe to that idea and share the sentiments of United States Ambassador Power on that matter. She was very convincing, as she was with regard to the other matters that she mentioned.

We are trying to cooperate with some of the countries of the region bilaterally in order to exchange experiences and share intelligence, particularly on linkages among various regional terrorist groups. It is our hope that there will be more enhanced cooperation and coordination on the basis of a common strategy among the countries of the region. We understand the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad basin region. It has resulted from a number of factors, including the security threats that it has been facing. Although there are competing priorities for addressing the worsening humanitarian situation around the world and the available resources are not commensurate with the challenges at hand, we believe that the situation in the Lake Chad basin region, particularly the plight of women, children, girls and minors there, is excruciatingly painful. We therefore remain hopeful that the United Nations and the rest of the international community will redouble their efforts to respond to the humanitarian challenge facing that region.

Moreover, we cannot overlook the impact of climate change and the extent to which it fuels conflict. That is one of the areas in which the imperatives of development, humanitarian concerns, the dangers of conflict, the problems associated with climate change and human rights concerns converge. It is therefore critical that the challenges facing the region be addressed in a comprehensive manner.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for the major contribution that he continues to make in discharging the mandate of his Office, not only with respect to the Lake Chad basin region but also in connection with our own region — the Horn of Africa.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): We express our deep appreciation to Under-Secretary-General O'Brien, Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun and Ms. Fatima Askira for their comprehensive briefings. We also welcome the representative of Nigeria.

We would like to raise several points.

First, we take note of the situation in the Lake Chad basin area, which we consider to be difficult and volatile.

Secondly, Kazakhstan strongly supports the work of the African Union aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the Multinational Joint Task Force on the fight against Boko Haram. This terrorist organization is threatening not just the Lake Chad basin area, but the African continent as a whole. In the struggle against Boko Haram, a global approach on the part of the international community, with leading functions on the part of the African countries, is needed.

Thirdly, Boko Haram remains a great threat to the region, despite the recent achievements reported by the countries of the region, which produced some positive results through increased military cooperation. Kazakhstan strongly condemns the deadly attack that occurred last December, in which 57 people were killed by two women suicide bombers in Maiduguri, Nigeria. We commend the progress made by Benin, Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad and other countries of the region in terms of the geographical area of operational activity and potential of this terrorist organization.

Fourthly, another aspect of this fight is the deteriorating humanitarian situation. The humanitarian crisis has worsened despite the military success against the group and is now one of the largest in the world. More than 7 million people in Nigeria, the Niger, Cameroon and Chad are internally displaced as a result. As was mentioned by the representative of the United Kingdom, more than 11 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Moreover, we have to ensure respect for the human rights of children, women, youth and all other vulnerable groups in the region. The slogan of our campaign to the Security Council included energy, water and food security for all. We need to ensure such important aspects of security for the region. We also emphasize in this regard that significant numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons add pressure on host communities that are already insecure in terms of those important pillars.

We therefore also support the Economic Community of West African States initiative to create a special fund of solidarity with the victims of terrorism. As our ministers discussed two days ago, we are convinced that the long-term stability and sustainable peace can be achieved only by understanding the strong connection between peace, security and development. In this regard, we should address the root causes of the crisis.

Fifthly, another problem is that some areas of the region remain inaccessible to humanitarian actors owing to the continued threat posed by Boko Haram. We believe that Council members must focus on how to increase the volume of humanitarian aid to the region and ensure that it reaches its final destination in full.

Finally, we commend the efforts of and measures taken by the United Nations, the African Union, international organizations and Governments to introduce peace initiatives in the Lake Chad basin area, thus requiring a synthesis between bottom-up approaches and top-down strategies in a way that brings about transformation.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The Senegalese delegation would like to congratulate the Swedish presidency of the Council for having convened this timely debate on the complex, multidimensional situation in the Lake Chad basin. It really is an urgent issue of concern, as was described very eloquently this afternoon by our briefers, Mr. Zerihoun, Mr. O'Brien and Ms. Askira, whom we all thank for their respective statements and for the updated and detailed information that they provided us.

Without referring back to the origins of the crisis, I think it fair to say that the physical constraints facing the area, including drought, desertification and climate change, compounded by the overexploitation of natural resources, are at the root of the structural vulnerability of the countries and the peoples of the Lake Chad basin. The situation exacerbates the effects and consequences of social conflicts relating to access to and the use and allocation of the basin's natural resources.

All of these factors taken together, as well as their negative impact on the social and economic fronts, have made this area fertile ground for the deadly activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group. In that respect, we welcome the fact, as has been mentioned that during the past year its spread was stemmed thanks to the concerted efforts of the countries of the region, supported in particular by the African Union, subregional organizations and other organizations and countries throughout the world.

But despite Boko Haram having been militarily weakened by the regional, coordinated response against it through, inter alia, the Multinational Joint Task Force, we must point out that it is by no means defeated and retains the capacity to wreak havoc, as it continues to demonstrate through various asymmetrical attacks and other acts of savagery. These residual activities unfortunately continue to have devastating effects on the political, social, economic, humanitarian and human rights situation in the areas where the group continues to carry out its attacks. Thus in addition to military action, an urgent and adequate humanitarian response must be provided so as to meet the numerous challenges on the ground, which include the massive displacement of people, the specific protection needs of refugees and displaced persons, food insecurity, and taking responsibility for the victims as well as for ex-Boko Haram fighters and their families, with a view to reintegrating them into their already crisis-affected societies of origin.

The report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (S/2016/996), issued in late November 2016, indicates that there were approximately 1,500 Boko Haram defectors in recent months. In this respect, the international call issued with

a view to enabling the reintegration of such defectors and members of their families should be heeded.

We commend the efforts undertaken by partners, including members of the Council, of course, and those deployed by humanitarian organizations, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Médecins sans frontières and other agencies. However, my delegation calls on the international community to increase its support for the region in the fight against Boko Haram by continuing to provide humanitarian assistance and support for early recovery, which the region urgently needs.

Here we would underline the crucial importance of funding. As Mr. O'Brien noted, $1.5 billion is being requested by humanitarian organizations to respond to the most urgent needs for 2017. It would also be desirable for the international community to provide political, logistical and financial support to the regional initiatives and structures that were created to overcome the challenges facing the region, including the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Lake Chad Basin Commission.

Nevertheless, the mobilization of the region at the national and subregional levels remains a priority. In that connection, it is important, as the Secretary-General has noted, for the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States finally to be able to hold the planned summit of Heads of State and Government on Boko Haram in order to devise a interregional strategy to address the crisis caused by that group, but also to specifically address the root causes that contributed to its emergence and resilience.

In addition to the military and humanitarian dimensions of our response, we must also consider the equally important elements of education, information and communication — with particular emphasis on raising awareness among the population, especially women and young people, and on engaging in dialogue with religious and other leaders, who have a key role to play in countering the violent extremist narrative. Similarly, in order to secure the tenuous progress made in our response to the crisis, our strategy must bolster the resilience of the States and communities of the Lake Chad basin region through urgent interventions within a broader long-term development framework.

In conclusion, the Security Council must actively consider the issue and show proactive solidarity to the States, organizations and humanitarian groups of the region that provide emergency aid to individuals and communities in need. Given the urgency of the situation, an imminent Security Council visit to the Lake Chad basin countries, as some delegations have suggested, would be a clear show of the support that we would like to see, as it could give new life to efforts under way to resolve the crisis.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Under-Secretary-General O'Brien and Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun for their detailed briefings about the development of the military, political and humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad basin region. We would also like to thank Ms. Fatima Yerima Askira for her very moving statement.

We are particularly concerned about the continuing activities of Boko Haram, which, in spite of the losses that it has suffered, remains a major source of instability in Cameroon, the Niger, Nigeria and Chad. The fact that Boko Haram pledged allegiance to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in March 2015 makes it even more urgent to mount an immediate, unified and robust response to the terrorist threat in Africa.

We are very worried about the group's new tactic, whereby it refrains from direct clashes with Government armed forces, preferring to attack civilians or civilian facilities and use suicide bombers and explosive devices. That is precisely why ridding territories of fighters has not led to improvements in the humanitarian sphere. The problems of refugees, humanitarian access and other issues related to terrorist activities cannot be resolved without eliminating the threat posed by the terrorist group. In that connection, we welcome the efforts of the Lake Chad Basin Commission States and the Multinational Joint Task Force, which was created by them and Benin. We are convinced that only through joint efforts will it be possible to achieve victory.

In that connection, we also think that the decision adopted at the twenty-seventh African Union Summit, held in Kigali in July 2016, on establishing a counter-terrorist fund for the continent will be crucial to the elimination of terrorism in Africa. We also greatly value the measures taken by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the specialized agencies of the United Nations in providing multifaceted assistance to the countries of the Lake Chad basin region. We are convinced that, in addition to combating

the terrorist threat, it is essential to tackle the deep-rooted causes of the region's problems, which requires eliminating poverty and fostering social and economic development. We will continue to actively cooperate with the States of the region in the framework of regional structures, including the African Union, and on a bilateral basis.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I would also like to thank all of today's briefers for their important input.

As we have all heard from the briefers, the humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad basin region is truly one of the most neglected in the world. So far, the international community has not had much success in resolving the multifaceted problems of the region — not for lack of trying, but because of a lack of understanding of how to deal with all of them at once. Extreme poverty, severe food insecurity and malnutrition, weak governance, climate change, particularly desertification, and the destructive activities of Boko Haram — all of those factors contribute to the disastrous situation. In that regard, we have a few points to make.

First of all, how can the Security Council effectively react to the crisis, apart from expressing its deep concerns and calling for more international awareness? Such actions no longer impress anyone. Instead, we have to find a proper role for the Security Council to play. First of all, the Council has to be fully aware that a constantly deteriorating humanitarian crisis can evolve into a full-blown threat to peace and security in the region. An already apparent constraint with security implications lies in the fact that, owing to dwindling economic resources and the resulting strains on State budgets, regional Governments are struggling in their efforts to eradicate Boko Haram, which poses an undeniable and serious security threat.

In that regard, we commend the efforts of the Multinational Joint Task Force and other actors that are fighting that terrorist group. But the countries of the region need additional support from the international community in order to rise to that challenge.

In our opinion, the Council would do well to engage in a serious discussion on how to strengthen the use of existing sanctions mechanisms against Boko Haram's members and its affiliates. Relevant inputs and initiatives from the region would contribute greatly to the Council's work on that subject. Additionally, improving socioeconomic conditions has to be the top priority, if any progress is to be made in alleviating the immense suffering of people in the Lake Chad basin region.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia would like to thank Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun and Mr. Stephen O'Brien for their briefings this morning on the humanitarian and security situation in the Lake Chad basin region. We would also like to particularly thank Ms. Fatima Yerima Askira from the Borno Women Development Initiative for her testimony.

As I listened to the statements of my colleagues, I took notes on some of the words that impacted me personally, but I can only assume that they had a similar effect on everyone gathered here: famine, slavery, captivity, abduction, forced marriage, brutality, extreme crisis, horror, fear, disease, killings, suicide attacks, displaced persons, destruction and extreme poverty.

We, too, are concerned about the humanitarian and security crisis that has beset the Lake Chad basin region for several years now. Boko Haram continues to pose a threat to the subregion, the African continent and international peace and security. We commend the progress made in combating that extremist group thanks to the enhanced cooperation over the past two years among Nigeria, Chad, the Niger, Cameroon and other countries through the special Multinational Joint Task Force.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia firmly condemns the acts committed by the Boko Haram terrorist group, which poses a serious threat to international peace and security and exacerbates the region's already fragile humanitarian situation. The actions of that terrorist organization are reprehensible and include the kidnapping of girls, boys and young men and women, as well as the destruction of civilian infrastructure, such as schools. We express our solidarity with the victims of Boko Haram's criminal activities, including the most recent deadly attack in Madagali on 9 December 2016, in which 57 people died from two suicide bomb attacks and the attack described by Mr. O'Brien that occurred on 8 January. We demand the immediate and unconditional release of those who were kidnapped, including those who were forcibly recruited.

The humanitarian disaster affecting the region is a source of great concern. As many members of the Council have already pointed out, the crisis in the Lake Chad subregion has had little media coverage but is one of the greatest challenges faced by the

Security Council and the international community. According to information released by Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in December 2016, 11 million people in the Lake Chad basin region required humanitarian aid and 2.6 million people were displaced. As I read those figures, the same sentiment as that expressed by my Uruguayan colleague crossed my mind. Bolivia has a population of 10 million, and the tragic situation before us today affects an even greater number of people than my country's entire population.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia reaffirms that defeating terrorism once and for all does not depend on military action alone. As Ms. Askira stated, in order to make headway on the problem of addressing its root causes, it is essential to develop a long-term response not only to the military and political challenges, but also, and most important, to the economic and social challenges. Bolivia will support initiatives to bolster the efforts of the countries on the front line of that fight, while respecting their sovereignty and independence. Similarly, we call upon regional organizations to enhance their efforts to address that tragic situation.

The President: I would now like to make a brief statement in my capacity as the representative of Sweden.

Earlier this week, during our open debate on conflict prevention and sustaining peace (see S/PV.7857), my Foreign Minister noted that prevention efforts require us to address the root causes of conflict and instability before the crises concerned reach the Security Council's agenda. The subject of today's briefing is a vivid example of the consequences of the failure to act early in response to fragility and underdevelopment.

As stated by many, there is a clear need for a comprehensive regional approach, focusing not only on the immediate insecurity and humanitarian crisis, but also on longer-term challenges and root causes. The aim of putting the Lake Chad basin region on today's agenda is not to stigmatize a region, but rather to put the spotlight on a silent and often neglected crisis and to pave the way forward for increased engagement in the region and with the region.

The situation is a complex one. The conflict and violence that has led to immense human suffering and humanitarian needs in the region are the result of an insurgency by Boko Haram, which has indiscriminately been targeting civilians, even attacking them, even in places to which they have fled to find shelter and safety. However, the root causes run deeper. They include the challenges presented by a growing population of young people with little hope for the future and a lack of investment in the region. It includes climate change and its impacts — drought, land degradation and desertification — which lead to resource scarcity and food insecurity, which, in turn, generate conditions that spur conflict.

I believe that we need to ensure that the United Nations system can provide adequate risk assessment related to climate change, as has been requested by many African and Pacific island States. I think that that would also improve the way in which the Council understands the connection between climate and security. The large number of vulnerable, malnourished and displaced persons was mentioned by Mr. O'Brien, and they are almost impossible to comprehend. I just wanted to remind the Council of the picture that Ms. Askira painted for us earlier. Her voice was powerful, but the line was slightly weak. She said,

> "Picture a woman lying sick in the sand, covering herself with a tattered rug. Her children, four, six and seven years old, sitting right next to her, with no idea of what to eat that day".

Progress and scaled-up assistance in recent months by the United Nations system and partner organizations deserve to be recognized as part of the regional efforts to address the crisis. But the desperate conditions persist, and recent weeks have once again seen an upsurge in suicide bombings and attacks on civilians and displaced persons. So what do we do?

First, we must step up humanitarian assistance. The conference to be held in Oslo on 24 February presents an opportunity to mobilize additional support and reinforced engagement on the part of the international community. We must also bring in development actors and international financial institutions more robustly, so as to enable recovery, reconstruction and longer-term development, which is crucial for creating conditions for the return of displaced populations and for building resilience.

We must also heed the voices of women in their diverse roles. Ms. Askira's powerful briefing to the Council presents clear evidence of that. I think that we also need to work more closely with and support national Governments and regional organizations, including in their efforts to make progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, on which we

have all agreed and which needs to be implemented. As many have mentioned, we need to support Governments in their fight against Boko Haram, so as to replace Boko Haram's savagery with the rule of law, justice and benevolent State authority. The nature of the crisis, which involves challenges that do not respect borders, requires an integrated and comprehensive response for the whole region. I think the idea behind today's briefing was precisely to raise awareness, but we must remain engaged across the board and follow up. As the next step, I think that it makes perfect sense to follow up with a trip by the Council to the region.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Bosah (Nigeria): First and foremost, I would like to thank the Swedish presidency and the entire membership of the Security Council for organizing today's briefing. It is indeed emblematic of the interest of the United Nations in the security situation in the Lake Chad basin region. We are particularly and deeply appreciative of the work by the Council and its positive attitude in seeking to resolve the security and humanitarian situation and the crisis in the Lake Chad basin region. Our special appreciation goes to Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his insights into the situation in the region, and to Ms. Fatima Yerima Askira for sharing her perspective on the matter being discussed.

When Boko Haram reared its ugly head in Nigeria a couple of years ago, it heavily impacted virtually every facet of human endeavour in the north-eastern part of Nigeria, including the economy, policy and people's livelihoods. That impact also had unsavoury reverberations across the country. The insurgency and its attendant consequences may have tested our will, but they have not broken the resolve and the resilience of the Nigerian people.

It has been a difficult time that has fuelled additional waves of terrorism and violent extremism in other parts of the world. In spite of the devastation in the Lake Chad basin region occasioned by the Boko Haram insurgency, we are happy to report that the Multilateral Joint Task Force has recorded great success in degrading Boko Haram. We have continued to witness the emergence of survivors and victims who have been rescued from Boko Haram's brutal oppression in the north-east.

For its part, the Nigerian Government has made significant progress in the fight against Boko Haram. Just before Christmas, our military successfully took over the Sambisa forest, formerly a hideout of the Boko Haram militants. That progress notwithstanding, the Government is aware of the other challenges impacting development in the region, including the shrinking of Lake Chad, a situation that continues to serve as a tinderbox for violence and attendant humanitarian crises. Tackling that problem successfully by recharging the lake will require major international intervention.

As we celebrate our gains in the war against Boko Haram, we are not oblivious to the humanitarian challenges that the crisis has created through the massive displacement of persons, the abandonment of farmlands and the disruption of the educational system. In that regard, the Government of Nigeria is embarking on programmes aimed at restoring the livelihoods of the communities in those areas. We have put in place a robust, people-driven counter-terrorism strategy based on a combination of revamped security operations and a human rights-based approach, which will help to implement rehabilitation, reintegration and reconstruction. In order to achieve that, we have empowered the Presidential Committee on North-East Intervention with a mandate to coordinate and provide synergy, leadership and direction for the various initiatives in the area, encompassing the Government, development partners, private foundations and civil society. We are also accelerating the implementation of existing legal and institutional frameworks for alleviating our people's suffering in the region in order to improve the effectiveness of our humanitarian efforts, in the spirit of the Istanbul World Humanitarian Summit of May 2016.

Nigeria is firmly committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and recognizes that it is the primary responsibility of States to protect civilians within their national jurisdiction. That conviction underlines our Government's resolve to take all the measures necessary to protect civilians in the battle against Boko Haram and similar terrorist groups. Indeed, no priority is higher for the Government than to rescue all those whom the group is holding hostage. We should stress that the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls remain in Nigeria's national consciousness, and that the Government is working hard to ensure the release of all Nigerians held captive by Boko Haram, including the Chibok girls. Once they are freed, we are ready

to ensure their swift rehabilitation and reintegration and the continuation of their studies. Overall, we are focusing our efforts on ensuring that all victims can regain their personal dignity and resume the enjoyment of their God-given fundamental rights and freedoms as soon as possible in Nigeria's democratic setting.

I would like to emphasize that our holistic approach in that endeavour is based on the promotion of good governance, transparency and accountability. We renew our call for determined international action to help us meet the victims' humanitarian needs and address the root causes of terrorism itself. Genuine humanitarian intervention by the international community must no longer be delayed or downplayed. It is time for collective global action aimed at investing in the people of Nigeria's north-east and the Lake Chad basin region.

The President: I would like once again to thank the three briefers and the representative of Nigeria for their participation in today's meeting. And, of course, I thank the members of the Council for their statements and, more important, their engagement on this issue.

We have noted and welcomed the progress made by the Governments in the region to push back Boko Haram and improve humanitarian access. That progress must be consolidated, sustained and supported. I heard support around the table for a reinforced humanitarian engagement, working with the Governments of the region to meet the growing humanitarian needs there. In that regard, the conference in Oslo in February will be an important milestone. I also heard support for more long-term and sustained engagement from development partners in the region, which would include addressing the root causes of the problems and the underlying needs. Finally, there were calls for more regular and sustained engagement on the issue on the part of the Council, and it was proposed that the Council visit the region. Let us make every effort to ensure that 2017 does indeed become a turning point for the people of the region of the Lake Chad basin.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.